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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: GA PLENARY: ANNUAL DEBATE: THE SITUATION IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST AND THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The General Assembly met from November 30 - December 2 on the "Question of Palestine" and "Situation in the Middle East." The debate on the Question of Palestine included speeches from the President of the General Assembly, 42 countries and the Palestine Observer Mission. Most Speakers condemned the situation in the Palestinian territories and expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people. Israel noted the biased nature of the resolutions under this agenda item and the report by the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Sweden, on behalf of the EU called for a comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestine issue. The debate on the Situation in the Middle East included speeches from 12 countries. The majority of the speeches attacked Israeli actions, but some also called for all sides to work towards peace. Australia called on Hamas to end its rocket attacks on Israel and expressed concern about the IAEA findings of evidence that there had been nuclear related activity in Syria. The Syrian PermRep, in what appeared to be an unscripted right of reply, decried Australia's "ignorance" of the reason for the General Assembly debate on the Situation in the Middle East. He said the debate is held to focus on Israeli occupation and violations carried out against the Palestinian people, and Israeli violations of the NPT. Following the debate the General Assembly took action on six resolutions, all of which passed by a large margin. On December 16 the General Assembly adopted the EU-drafted resolution "Assistance to the Palestinian People" by consensus.

12. (SBU) PGA Treki opened the three days of debate with a statement noting that the Palestinian problem is the oldest unresolved issue before the GA. He stated that "the fact that the question of Palestine is still unresolved weighs heavily on the UN." Treki noted the impact of the blockade of the Gaza strip and the impact of "collective punishment" on the Palestinian people. He said that the question of Palestine is at a "critical juncture" and that a sustained focus and reinvigoration of the peace process is needed.

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The Question of Palestine  
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13. (SBU) The Senegalese PermRep and Chairman of the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, introduced the four draft resolutions under the agenda item Question of Palestine. He stated that the situation is "bleak" and worsening in Gaza due to last winter's Israeli military offensive. He noted that there is no support for settlements or Israel's claim over the whole of Jerusalem. Senegal's PermRep stated that the Committee supports the two-state solution and that "serious, honest and good-faith

negotiations" must be held on all permanent status issues. The PermRep of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee, noted that actions of the Israeli Defense Forces during Operation Cast Lead led to allegations of violations of international humanitarian law, and possibly "war crimes". He also noted the effects of the blockade, calling it "suffocating".

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The Situation in the Middle East  
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¶4. (SBU) The Egyptian PermRep introduced the two draft resolutions under the agenda item the Situation in the Middle East stating that the resolutions "are aimed at expressing the international community's rejection of Israel's continuing occupation and illegal activities in the occupied Arab territories". He stated that the resolution on Jerusalem points out settlement activities to "alter the geographic and demographic features of the area, essentially to annex it in order to consolidate an illegal occupation". The Egyptian PermRep explained that the draft resolution on the Syrian Golan calls for an end of the illegal Israeli occupation. He noted that both resolutions are designed to get Israel to negotiate the establishment of a Palestinian state, end the occupation of Arab territories, and end "illegal practices".

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General Debate  
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¶5. (SBU) The Palestinian Observer statement began by noting that Palestinians do not have a country, half of the Palestinian population continues to live as refugees, and the other half lives under occupation. The Palestinians noted

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that Israel continues to deny the rights of the Palestinian people and "to breach international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law." Collective punishment, in the form of closures and blockades, continues as does settlement building in East Jerusalem, according to the Palestinian Observer Mission, but the Palestinian leadership is making efforts towards national unity and towards a comprehensive peace agreement. The Palestinians called on Israel to fulfill its obligations under the road map - including the cessation of settlement activities.

¶6. (SBU) Israel noted that it absorbed Jewish refugees when the creation of Israel in 1948 led Jewish citizens to be expelled from Arab countries, while Arab states have not absorbed Palestinian refugees. Israel stated that it wants to re-enter negotiations with the Palestinians and is "serious about its intention to pursue peace." Israel stated that it "will discuss peace at any time, anywhere, and without preconditions." Israel reiterated its recent announcement of a policy of settlement restraint that includes the suspension of new permits and construction in the West Bank for a period of ten months. Israel opined that Iran is the "most dangerous threat to peace in the region," because it exports violence, hatred and terrorism to the region through its funding and supplying of Hizballah and Hamas.

¶7. (SBU) Egypt, on behalf of the NAM, called for the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Egypt cited the "illegal settlement activities" and the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel, as impediments to the peace process. Egypt stressed that the situation in Gaza is "unacceptable, un-sustainable and had negative repercussions on all efforts to advance the peace process" and called on Israel to open the borders to allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

¶8. (SBU) Sweden, speaking on behalf of the EU, expressed concerned about the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process. The EU called on both parties to take concrete measures to resume negotiations. The EU noted concern over settlement activities, house demolitions and evictions in the occupied territories and the effects of the closures on the Gaza Strip. The EU called for a halt of rocket attacks on Israel and the release of Gilad Shalit. The EU stated that it will continue promoting Palestinian state building efforts and will work with the Palestinian Authority on reform. The EU welcomed "the positive steps taken by the Israeli authorities regarding the easing of restrictions on the West Bank."

¶9. (SBU) Other notable speeches included Venezuela, Japan and Canada. Venezuela stated that the Palestinian people are continuing "their memorable fight against the U.S. empire, their lackeys and the genocidal state of Israel, which runs over, kills and attempts to exterminate the Palestinian people." Japan called for a two-state solution and for both sides to fulfill responsibilities under the previous agreements. Canada stated that it respects Israel's right to exist securely within its borders and Palestine's right to exist. Canada noted, with optimism, Israel's announcement of a 10 month moratorium on settlements construction in the West Bank and condemned the sporadic rocket attacks from southern Lebanon and Gaza.

¶10. (SBU) Australia stated that a two-state solution is the only possible basis for negotiations. Australia called for Israel to stop settlement activities and said that the Palestinians must have a unified and viable entity to engage in negotiations. Australia called for: Hamas to stop rejecting Israel's right to exist, Hamas to end rocket attacks on Israel, Israel to stop responding with disproportionate force, and an end to arms smuggling into Gaza and the release of Gilad Shalit. Australia also called for respect of Lebanese sovereignty and integrity, expressed hope that Israeli-Syrian talks would resume, and noted with concern IAEA reports regarding finding of "undeclared nuclear materials" in Syria.

¶11. (SBU) Right of Reply: Lebanon, in response to Israel's statement, noted that Hizballah was formed because of Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory. Syria, in response to Australia's statement, noted that Australia "missed the point that the discussion...is on the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and ways to put an end to the continued Israeli

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aggression against the people of the area." Syria continued that Australia attempted to "deflect that issue by bringing in issues that had no relevance to the item under discussion." The Syrian PermRep, finished what appeared to be an unscripted reply by stating that it is Israel that has rejected IAEA inspections and Australia, by ignoring this fact, demonstrated a serious bias.

¶12. (SBU) Ambassador Richard Erdman delivered the U.S. explanation of vote (Note: The full text can be found at <http://usun.state.gov/briefing/statements/2009/132978.htm>). Vote tallies have been forwarded to IO/UNP.

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Assistance to the Palestinian People  
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¶13. (SBU) The EU drafted resolution, Assistance to the Palestinian People, was adopted by consensus on December 16. Israel joined consensus, but delivered an explanation of position. The Israeli EOP called the resolution unique because it is "constructive" and seeks to assist Palestinians by increasing economic and development capacities. Israel noted "due in part to Israeli measures" economic growth in the West Bank stands at eight percent. Israel expressed concern that the resolution, particularly phrases referring

to assistance to the Gaza Strip, do not take Israel's security needs into account. Israel called for the Palestinians to return to bilateral negotiations.

¶14. (SBU) The Palestinian Observer Mission noted that foreign aid and assistance is a "lifeline" for those living under "occupation" and as refugees. The Palestinian Deputy PermRep stated that Israeli blockade is an "obstruction of assistance" and that most of the aid pledged at the Sharm el-Sheikh conference has not yet reached Gaza. Further the Palestinian statement noted that Israel's willingness to join the consensus on the resolution "does not absolve Israel from its responsibilities under international humanitarian and human rights law to end the blockade."

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